K-C 17,719
KCC 4911

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Application of Bean et al. Art Unit 3761
Serial No. 10/620,142
Filed July 15, 2003
Confirmation No. 8474
For ABSORBENT ARTICLE HAVING A STRETCHABLE REINFORCEMENT MEMBER
Examiner Jacqueline F. Stephens

APPEAL BRIEF

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May 8, 2007

APPEAL BRIEF

This is an appeal from the final rejection of the claims of the above-referenced application made in the final Office action dated November 22, 2006. A Notice of Appeal was filed on March 13, 2007.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge the fee for the appeal brief in the amount of $500 to Deposit Account No. 19-1345. The Commissioner is also hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required to Deposit Account No. 19-1345.

I. REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest in connection with the present appeal is Kimberly-Clark Worldwide, Inc. of 401 N. Lake Street, Neenah, Wisconsin 54957-0349, a corporation of the state of Delaware, owner of a 100 percent interest in the pending application.

II. RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

Appellant is unaware of any pending appeals or interferences which may be related to, directly affect or be directly affected by, or have a bearing on, the Board's decision in the pending appeal.

III. STATUS OF CLAIMS

Claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65, and 70 are currently pending in the application for consideration. Claim 28 has been withdrawn and claims 1-19, 44-50, and 66-69 have been cancelled. A copy of the claims involved in this appeal appears in the Claims Appendix of this Brief.

Claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65, and 70 stand rejected.

The rejections of claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65, and 70 are being appealed.

IV. STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

No amendments have been filed after the final rejection.

V. SUMMARY OF CLAIMED SUBJECT MATTER

The following summary correlates claim elements to specific embodiments described in the application specification, but does not in any manner limit claim interpretation. Rather, the following summary is provided only to facilitate the Board's understanding of the subject matter of this appeal.

With reference to the present specification and drawings, claim 20 is directed to an absorbent structure 10 comprising an absorbent member 33 at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member 40 at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0035], pages 8 and 9, and Fig. 1. The absorbent member 33 has a first axis extending generally lengthwise of the absorbent member and a second axis perpendicular to the first axis extending generally widthwise of the absorbent member. See Fig. 1. The reinforcing member 40 comprises a first set of substantially parallel strands 82, and a second set of strands 84 that cross the first set of strands at junctions in a non-orthogonal relationship to define openings

86 in the reinforcing member. See paragraph [0050], pages 17 and 18, and Figs. 8A and 8B. At least some of the fibers of the absorbent member 33 extend through the openings 86 in the reinforcing member 40 and are entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0058], pages 22 and 23.

Claim 32 is directed to an absorbent structure 32 comprising an absorbent member 33 at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member 40 at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0035], pages 8 and 9, and Fig. 1. The reinforcing member 40 is connected to the absorbent member 33 and at least partially gathers the absorbent member to form rugosities 90 on a surface of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0069], page 28, and Fig. 5B.

Claim 51 is directed to an absorbent structure 32 for absorbing liquid comprising an absorbent member 33 at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member 40 at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0035], pages 8 and 9, and Fig. 1. The reinforcing member 40 has a non-uniform transverse width and openings 86 therein. See paragraph [0050], pages 17 and 18, paragraph [0074], pages 32 and 33, and Figs. 6A and 6B. At least some of the fibers of the absorbent member 33 extend through the openings 86 in the reinforcing member 40 and are entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member. See paragraph [0058], pages 22 and 23.

VI. GROUNDS OF REJECTION TO BE REVIEWED ON APPEAL

A. Appellants appeal the rejections of claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65 and 70 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,536,264 (Hsueh et al.).

VII. ARGUMENT

Claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65 and 70 are nonobvious in view of and patentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,536,264 (Hsueh et al.).

Claims 20-31

Claim 20 is directed to an absorbent structure comprising an absorbent member that is at least partially made of fibers, and a reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member. The reinforcing member is comprised of a first set of substantially parallel strands and a second set of strands that cross the first set of strands at junctions in a non-orthogonal relationship thereby defining openings in the reinforcing member. At least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extend through the openings in the reinforcing member and are entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

Claim 20 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al., in that the reference fails to teach or suggest an absorbent structure comprising the combination of an absorbent member that is at least partially made of fibers, a reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member and constructed of first and second strands arranged in a non-orthogonal relationship to define openings in the reinforcing member, and at least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extending through openings in the reinforcing member and entangling with other fibers of the absorbent member.

Hsueh et al. disclose an absorbent composite comprising a porous macrostructure of absorbent gelling particles and a

substrate. With reference to Fig. 1, the absorbent composite 70 comprises an absorbent layer 71 (the macrostructure layer) bonded to a supporting substrate layer 72. The absorbent layer 71 is formed from of a plurality of absorbent gelling particles that are interconnected by intermolecular cross-linking of the absorbent molecules. In the embodiment of Fig. 9, the absorbent gelling particles are interconnected by cross-linking to form a net like configuration of the macrostructure layer 81, e.g., having openings therein. The substrate layer 82 (Fig. 9) is formed of a cellulosic material, such as a cellulose foam layer, and is chemically bonded to the macrostructure (e.g., in face-to-face relationship) by a cross-linking agent.

Figures 4 and 5 of Hsueh et al. illustrate a multilayered absorbent composite 70 in which a plurality of substrate layers 72 a,b,c,d,e are intermittently attached or bonded to a plurality of absorbent macrostructure layers 71 a,b,c,d, e.g., in a layered approach. As best understood, the Office's characterization of this disclosure is that one middle absorbent composite (e.g., the combination of macrostructure layer 71b and substrate 72b) is equated to the reinforcing member recited in claim 20 while upper and/or lower composites (e.g., upper composite formed by layers 71a, 72a and lower composite 71c and 72d) comprise the recited absorbent member.

Irrespective of the Office's characterization of Hsueh et al., the cited reference fails to disclose or even suggest fibers of an absorbent member 1) passing through openings in a reinforcing member and 2) being entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member as recited in claim 20. Hsueh et al. only teach 1) chemically bonding the macrostructure layer to the substrate layer (see, e.g., column 23, lines 12-65), and/or 2) compacting or pressing the macrostructure layer and substrate layer together (see, e.g., column 36, lines 8-16). Chemical

bonding and compacting do not result in absorbent member fibers passing through the reinforcing member and becoming entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member. Rather, these are, at best, surface to surface bondings of one layer to another, and not entanglement of one layer to itself.

In the final Office action (at page 2, item 1, first paragraph), the Office relied on the disclosure by Hsueh et al. at column 23, lines 21-23 that the chemical bonding that bonds the absorbent layer to the substrate layer can be hydrogen bonding, ionic/coulombic bonding, polymer entanglement bonding, and covalent bonding. However, following Appellants' Response to Final Office Action dated January 22, 2007 the Office agreed that polymer entanglement bonding is not tantamount to the recited absorbent member fiber to absorbent member fiber entanglement recited in claim 20 and therefore no longer relies on this disclosure by Hsueh et al. See the Advisory Action dated February 27, 2007.

Instead, the Office now relies on the disclosure by Hsueh et al. at col. 22, lines 46-52 that the absorbent macrostructure layer and the substrate layer can be bonded or interconnected together by a variety of chemical, physical, and adhesive agents. See again the Advisory Action dated February 27, 2007. Discounting the chemical agents, which the office agreed does not amount to the recited entanglement, and the adhesive agents which are clearly a surface to surface bonding and not an entanglement, the Office's position it that the broad teaching of physical bonding is tantamount to the recited absorbent member fiber to absorbent member fiber entanglement. More particularly, the Office points to the teaching by Hsueh et al. at col. 36, lines 7-16 of compacting the layers into a more sheet like form. See also col. 31, line 58 through col. 32, line 10.

The Office's position is, at best, an assertion of inherency. There is certainly no express teaching or disclosure by Hsueh et al. that the compacting of layers results in absorbent member fiber to absorbent member fiber entanglement as recited in claim 20. Rather, the Office's position must be that the compacting of layers necessarily results in the recited entanglement.

However, it is clearly not necessary, and is indeed unlikely, that the disclosed compacting or pressing multiple layers together does not result in fibers of one layer extending through openings in a second layer and entangling with other fibers of the first layer in the manner recited in claim 20. The compacting or pressing step disclosed by Hsueh et al. is for improving the "contact, and interconnection, of the absorbent gelling particles with adjacent particles and with the substrate layers." See column 36, lines 10-12 of Hsueh et al. In other words, the compacting or pressing is used to increase the bond between adjacent absorbent gelling particles and between the absorbent gelling particles and the substrate layer. Basically, Hsueh et al. teach that when absorbent gelling particles are adhered to each other or to the substrate layer the application of a compressive force increases adhesion between the two components being adhered together. Accordingly, this compaction is just another surface-to-surface connection taught by Hsueh et al.

Claim 20 specifically recites that fibers of the absorbent member 1) pass through openings in the reinforcing member and 2) entangle with other fibers of the absorbent member. That is, the recited entanglement is not a surface-to-surface connection and certainly is not between the fibers of the absorbent member and the reinforcing member. Rather, the recited entanglement is of the absorbent member with itself after passing through the

openings in the reinforcing member. Hsueh et al. clearly do not disclose this feature of claim 20.

Nowhere do Hsueh et al. teach or suggest that fibers of the absorbent gelling particles extend through openings in the substrate layer and entangle with other fibers of the absorbent gelling particles. Accordingly, the Office has impermissibly extended the teaching of Hsueh et al. beyond its disclosure and has assumed facts that are not set forth nor even inherent in the reference (i.e., that compaction necessarily results in fibers of the absorbent gelling particles pass through openings in the substrate layer and entangling with other fibers of the absorbent gelling particles).

The compacting or pressing step taught by Hsueh et al. would be insufficient to entangle fibers of the layer of absorbent gelling particles through the openings in the substrate. As explained in detail in appellants' specification, one embodiment of the absorbent structure is formed by air forming the absorbent member around the reinforcing member. The vacuum force exerted on the absorbent member during the air forming process is believed to provide the impetus for the entanglement between the absorbent member and the reinforcing member. See paragraph [0065], page 26 of appellants' specification. Hsueh et al. fail to disclose any step capable of entangling fibers of the absorbent gelling particles through openings in the substrate.

In addition, each embodiment of Hsueh et al. wherein the substrate layer 82 has openings 85 therein (e.g., the embodiments of Figs. 8 and 9), the layer of absorbent gelling particles 81 layer has corresponding openings. As a result, no portion of the layer of absorbent gelling particles 81 overlies the openings 85 in the substrate layer 82. Thus, any fibers making up the layer of absorbent gelling particle would be

unable to extend through the openings 85 in the substrate layer 82 and entangle with other fiber making up the layer of absorbent gelling particles.

Additionally, substrate layer of Hsueh et al. is necessary to support the absorbent gelling particles. The absorbent gelling particles thus would not be able to bridge one or more of the openings in the substrate. Instead, the gelling particles would break free from the layer. As mentioned at column 20, lines 7-10 of Hsueh et al., the substrate layer supports "the interconnected absorbent particles in the absorbent macrostructure." Without the substrate layer the absorbent particles would be unsupported.

Accordingly, Hsueh et al. fail to teach or suggest an absorbent structure wherein at least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extend through openings in the reinforcing member and entangle with other fibers of the absorbent member.

For these reasons, claim 20 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al.

Claims 21-27 and 29-31 depend directly or indirectly from claim 20 and are submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al. for at least the same reasons as claim 20.

Claims 32-38, 41-43, and 70

Claim 32 is directed to an absorbent structure that comprises an absorbent member that is at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent structure that is at least partially embedded in the absorbent member. Claim 32 further specifies that the reinforcing member is connected to the absorbent member and at least partially gathers the absorbent member to form rugosities on the surface of the absorbent member.

Claim 32 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al., in that the reference fails to disclose an absorbent structure in which a reinforcing member is at least partially embedded in a fibrous absorbent member, with the reinforcing member being connected to the absorbent member and at least partially gathering the absorbent member to form rugosities on the surface of the absorbent member.

As best understood from the undersigned's prior phone conference with the Examiner and the statements made at page 5 of the final Office action, the Office's position is that the absorbent composite 70 of Hsueh et al. is stretchable (relying on the disclosure at column 20, lines 42-47) and as a result of swelling of the gel particles upon absorbing liquid, rugosities will form in the surface of the absorbent composite. However, Hsueh et al. do not disclose that the absorbent composite is stretchable. Rather, the passage relied on by the Office merely states that the substrate layer 72a may be made from elastomers. There is no teaching that once the absorbent layer 71a is bonded to the substrate layer 72a to form the composite that the entire composite is stretchable. This is an assumption impermissibly made by the Office.

More notably, Hsueh et al. further lack any disclosure that the absorbent composite 70 (e.g., the combination of the absorbent layer 71a and the substrate 72a in Fig. 5) is gathered by a reinforcing member (e.g., the substrate layer 72a) to form rugosities on the surface of the absorbent layer, or on the surface of the absorbent composite. In fact, there is no disclosure or even a suggestion found anywhere in Hsueh et al. that rugosities or gatherings are formed in the surface of the absorbent composite 70, either before or after swelling of the gel particles of the absorbent layer 71a, or that such rugosities are desirable.

The final Office action, at page 5, takes the position that Hsueh et al. discloses that "the components are stretched to form voids." Appellants were unable, however, to find such a teaching in Hsueh et al. Rather, at column 6, line 65 through column 7, line 12, Hsueh et al. disclose only that the voids are formed by interconnecting strands of gel particles in a set pattern having the voids.

And in any event, swelling of the gel particles would, at best, result in stretching of the absorbent composite which would tension the surface of the composite, not gather and form rugosities therein. Moreover, once the gel particles are swelled, no retraction of the composite can occur and even if it could, it would only retract to its initial, dry state that is also ungathered and has no rugosities. Also, at column 7, lines 6-23 in reference to the embodiment of Fig. 9, where the absorbent composite is formed as a net-like structure it has a plurality of voids. Upon wetting of the gel particles, the particles swell and expand into the void space so that "planar expansion of the absorbent composite can be minimized."

Thus, there is no teaching or suggestion found anywhere in Hsueh et al. to provide a reinforcing member that gathers the absorbent member to form rugosities in the outer surface of the absorbent member.

For these reasons, claim 32 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al.

Claims 33-38, 41-43 and 70 depend directly or indirectly from claim 32 and are submitted to be patentable over Hsueh et al. for at least the same reasons as claim 32.

Claims 39 and 40

Claim 39 depends from claim 32 and further recites that the reinforcing member is comprised of strands arranged to cross

over one another at junctions to define openings in the web and that the strands are joined at some of the junctions. Nowhere do Hsueh et al. disclose that the substrate layer can be made from strands arranged to cross over one another at junctions to define openings in the web and that the strands are joined at some of the junctions. For these additional reasons, claim 39 and claim 40, which depends from claim 39, are further submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al.

Claims 51-57, 59, and 61-65

Claim 51 is directed to an absorbent structure for absorbing liquid that comprises an absorbent member that is at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent structure, that is at least partially embedded in the absorbing member and that has a non-uniform transverse width. The reinforcing member has openings therein. At least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extend through the openings in the reinforcing member and are entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

Claim 51 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al. for substantially the same reasons set forth above with respect to claim 20. That is, Hsueh et al. fail to disclose or suggest fibers of the absorbent member extending through openings in the reinforcing member and being entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

Claims 52-57, 59, and 61-65 depend directly or indirectly from claim 51 and are submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al. for at least the same reasons as claim 51.

Claim 58

Claim 58 depends from claim 51 and further recites that the reinforcing member is comprised of strands arranged to intersect one another at junctions to define openings in the web. Nowhere does Hsueh et al. teach or suggest that the substrate layer can be formed from strands that intersect one another at the junctions. Nor does the Office state that it does. For these additional reasons, claim 58 is further submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al.

Claim 60

Claim 60 depends from claim 51 and further recites that the reinforcing member is relaxed from a stretched condition in which connection of the reinforcing member to the absorbent member is made. Hsueh et al. clearly fail to teach or otherwise even suggest such this feature. Rather, if anything, Hsueh et al. at best teach that the absorbent composite may expand slightly upon wetting. But there is no disclosure of the absorbent composite relaxing from the stretched condition.

For these additional reasons, claim 60 is further submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over Hsueh et al.

VIII. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, appellants respectfully request that the Office's rejections be reversed and that claims 20-27, 29-43, 51-65 and 70 be allowed.

Respectfully submitted,

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CLAIMS APPENDIX

20. An absorbent structure comprising an absorbent member at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member, the absorbent member having a first axis extending generally lengthwise of the absorbent member and a second axis perpendicular to said first axis extending generally widthwise of the absorbent member, the reinforcing member comprising a first set of substantially parallel strands, and a second set of strands that cross said first set of strands at junctions in a non-orthogonal relationship to define openings in the reinforcing member, at least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extending through the openings in the reinforcing member and being entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

21. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein the second strands are generally parallel to each other.

22. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein the first set of strands extends generally parallel to one of said first and second axes.

23. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein the first set of strands extend generally parallel to the first axis of the absorbent member so that the reinforcing member is stretchable along at least said second axis of said absorbent structure.

24. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein the strands are joined to each other at least at some of the junctions.

25. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein said reinforcing members comprise a third set of strands that cross said first set of strands in a non-orthogonal orientation and also cross said second set of strands.

26. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 25 wherein the strands in the second set of strands are joined to strands in the third set of strands at least at some junctions where the sets cross.

27. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 25 wherein the strands of the second set are arranged generally perpendicular to the strands of the third set.

29. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 wherein the reinforcing member is made from an elastic material.

30. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 further comprising a second reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member.

31. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 20 in combination with an absorbent garment comprising an topsheet layer arranged for engagement with the body of a wearer, and a liquid impermeable backsheet, the absorbent structure being generally disposed between the topsheet layer and backsheet.

32. An absorbent structure comprising an absorbent member at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member, the reinforcing member being connected to the absorbent member and

at least partially gathering the absorbent member to form rugosities on a surface of the absorbent member.

33. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the reinforcing member is elastically stretchable.

34. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 33 wherein the reinforcing member is relaxed from a stretched condition in which connection of the reinforcing member to the absorbent member is made.

35. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the absorbent member is gathered along a first axis extending generally lengthwise of the absorbent member and along a second axis extending generally widthwise of the absorbent member.

36. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the basis weight of the absorbent member when the absorbent structure is stretched to remove gathering of the absorbent member is less than about 1200 grams per square meter.

37. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the basis weight of the absorbent member when the absorbent structure is relaxed to gather the absorbent member is less than about 1600 grams per square meter.

38. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the reinforcing member is adapted to return substantially to an original dimension for elongation of the absorbent structure in a direction up to about 300% of its relaxed length.

39. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the reinforcing member comprises strands arranged to cross over one another at junctions to define openings in the web, the strands being joined to each other at least at some of the junctions.

40. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 39 wherein the strands are arranged so that said openings are diamond shaped.

41. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 further comprising a second reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member.

42. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 in combination with an absorbent garment comprising a topsheet layer arranged for engagement with the body of a wearer, and a liquid impermeable backsheet layer, the absorbent structure being disposed between the topsheet layer and backsheet layer.

43. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the reinforcing member is elastically stretchable, and wherein the structure further comprises broken connections between the fibers and reinforcing member in at least one of a machine direction, a cross direction and a thickness direction caused by contraction of the reinforcing member within the structure.

51. An absorbent structure for absorbing liquid, the absorbent structure comprising an absorbent member at least partially made of fibers and a reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member for maintaining the structural integrity of the absorbent member, the reinforcing

member having a non-uniform transverse width, the reinforcing member having openings therein, at least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extending through the openings in the reinforcing member and being entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

52. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 wherein the reinforcing member has a peripheral shape generally conforming to a peripheral shape of the absorbent member.

53. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 wherein the reinforcing member has a first wider portion embedded in a first wider portion of the absorbent member, the first portion of the reinforcing member having a transverse width greater than a transverse width of a second narrower portion of said reinforcing member and embedded in a second narrower portion of said absorbent member.

54. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 53 wherein the reinforcing member is stretched in said first wider portion.

55. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 54 wherein the reinforcing member is unstretched in said second narrower portion.

56. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 54 wherein the reinforcing member is plastically deformed by stretching in said first wider portion.

57. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 53 wherein said second narrower portion comprises a first reinforcing member section and a second reinforcing member section folded against said first reinforcing member section to form said second narrower portion.

58. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 wherein reinforcing member comprise strands arranged in a pattern in which at least some of the strands intersect one another at junctions to define openings in the reinforcing members.

59. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 wherein the reinforcing member has a shape selected from the

group consisting of a generally hourglass shape and a generally T-shape.

60. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 wherein the reinforcing member is relaxed from a stretched condition in which connection of the reinforcing member to the absorbent member is made.

61. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 53 wherein the ratio of the width of said first wider portion of the reinforcing member to the width of said second narrower portion of the reinforcing member is greater than 1.5:1.

62. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 53 wherein the ratio of the width of said first wider portion of the reinforcing member to the width of said second narrower portion of the reinforcing member is greater than 2:1.

63. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 further comprising a second reinforcing member at least partially embedded in the absorbent member.

64. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 51 in combination with an absorbent garment comprising a topsheet layer arranged for engagement with the body of a wearer, and a liquid impermeable backsheet layer, the absorbent structure being disposed between the topsheet layer and backsheet layer.

65. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 64 wherein the absorbent garment includes a crotch region adapted to fit a crotch of the wearer and a waist region adapted to fit at least a portion of a waist of the wearer, the reinforcing member being narrower in the crotch region than in the waist region.

70. An absorbent structure as set forth in claim 32 wherein the reinforcing member has openings therein, at least some of the fibers of the absorbent member extending through the openings in the reinforcing member and being entangled with other fibers of the absorbent member.

EVIDENCE APPENDIX

None.

RELATED PROCEEDINGS APPENDIX

None.